

Working Futures

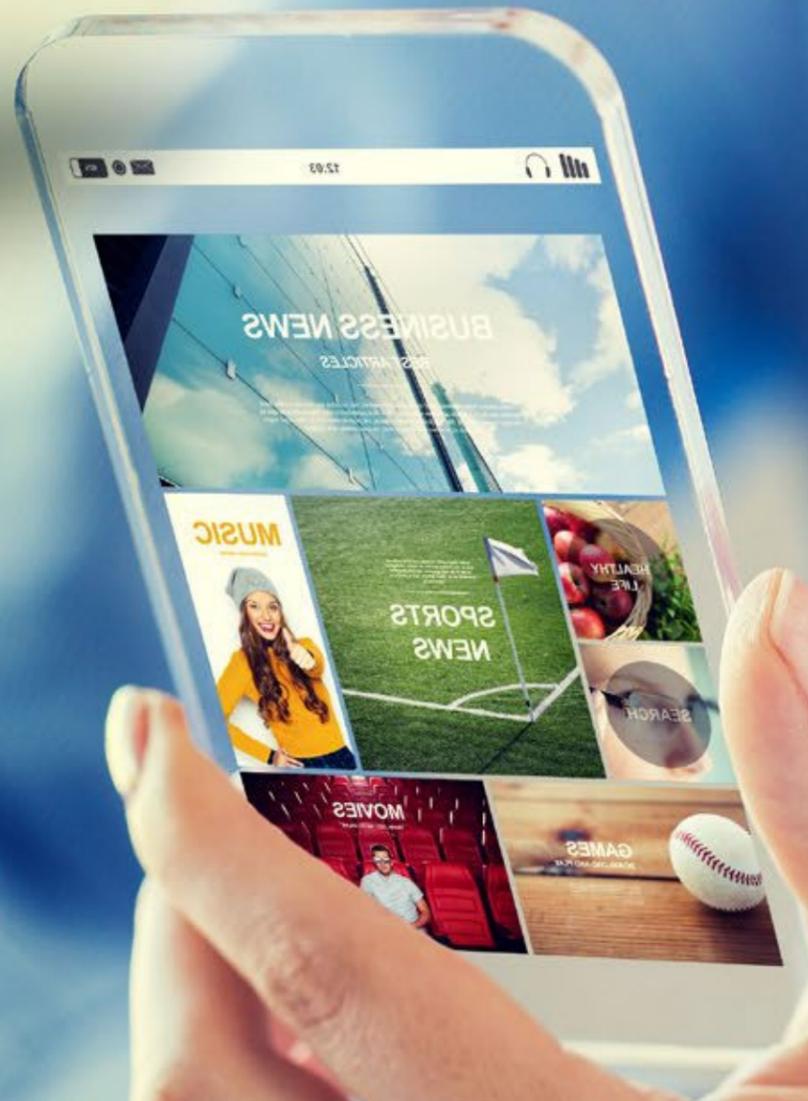
This series considers three aspects of our working future – Human, Digital and Physical – examining emerging trends and the changes they'll mean for us all.

We explore how Productivity, Collaboration and Efficiency are impacted in each of these contexts, and offer takeaway tips to help you prepare for what's to come.

The Physical Workplace of the Future

We're all a product of our environment, and at work, this can mean the difference between a fulfilled, engaged working life, and a depleted, lacklustre treadmill where nobody's happy.

Spurred by alarming employee disengagement statistics and growth of new technologies in the workplace, there's a wave of innovation in our physical workplaces. We've moved beyond the conventional open plan to more creative ways of breaking down internal barriers, and leaning into the capabilities of technology to reinvent the humble office.



Productivity

Are you really engaged at work? You would be in the minority if you are. There's an engagement crisis globally, with only 13% of employees engaged in their jobs (Gallup). Australia is no different. 2016 research from Effectory found only 27% of Australian employees are engaged and committed to their work. Other studies put that number even lower.

We're more productive when we're engaged in our work; sense of purpose is inextricably connected to our productivity. To fix this systemic issue, businesses are moving toward a model that gives their people the ability to curate a working environment suitable to their personal needs - day by day, project by project. They're also using clever digital products, like touch surveys on your mobile phone, to capture staff sentiment in real-time, as required, rather than waiting on periodic formal surveys.

As new generations of workers look for a greater sense of purpose and mission in their organisations, smart businesses are taking the opportunity to reflect this in their physical environments. Gone are the fancy art collections and cheesy motivational slogans. Workplaces now need to inspire workers as well as sustain them, and there is a renaissance in creative, branded and authentic interior design to reflect the values and personality of a company and its people. The stunning offices of companies like AirBnB and Slack embody this trend. AirBnB offices feature caravans, treehouses and other remarkable areas to 'find yourself at home'. The Asia Pacific headquarters of Slack (in Melbourne) has taken inspiration from nature – inter-connecting veins on leaves, bountiful greenery – to honour its mission of collaboration and community.



The office should feel as inviting as home, closing the gap between what you do and what you love. Physical technology can be hidden away until needed, and digital tools can be used to help people stay engaged and productive in real-time.



Collaboration

The workplace of the future is the ultimate connector. While staff might work flexibly or remotely, the physical home of the business remains its heart, and an important part of nurturing camaraderie. Cutting edge workplaces are engineering for this connection, reducing individual offices and increasing the number of diverse, often creatively decorated shared spaces available for staff. A Regus study found that Australian workers believe that spaces designed for collaboration are 74% more likely to produce innovation and 72% more likely to engage the entrepreneurial spirit (2015).

Google famously allows its staff 10% of working time to dedicate to purely creative work. More businesses are taking a leaf out of the start-up playbook, running hackathons as internal innovation events, where staff down tools and focus on honing their skills as creative 'hackers'. 'Workshop' zones are becoming more common, housing technology or toys employees are actively encouraged to experiment with, to drive collaboration and innovative thinking.

Businesses are being challenged to invest more in their people and make work a more holistic endeavor than showing up and clocking in. Wellness initiatives (such as a meditation room, or on-site yoga classes) are growing in popularity, as are 'show and tell' events where workers can teach, share or inspire colleagues with knowledge or creations from their working life and beyond.

The physical office is evolving to reflect new ways of working. Bringing work and leisure closer together helps productivity, freeing up more time for creative thinking and collaborative working. Offices will benefit from more compact tech solutions that free even more space to create environments in which workers thrive together.

Efficiency

Furniture that thinks might seem like science-fiction, but it's already here. The Internet of Things has ushered in the capability to build computing power into objects, meaning our desks, chairs and meeting rooms (among other things) can start to modify their functionality based on how we're using them.

Smart objects, wearable technology, heat sensors and other solutions, can feed back real-time data to the office manager or head of Human Resources about how people are using their environment, highlighting things that might need to change or adjust. The ability to move fast and customise your workplace to emerging needs is key to future proofing your success. Envision a reconfigurable meeting room that changes size and structure at the touch of a button. Digital whiteboards can hide away until needed, and personalised settings or preferences can be saved for later.

Ever felt like travelling down the wormhole? You might just get the chance, all in a day's work! Always-on video conferencing, dubbed 'wormholes' for the space-time warping sensation they induce, is a rising trend in intelligent workplace design. They can create a seamless sense of connection between teammates and offices far apart in physical distance.

Australian media giant REA Group was an early adopter, setting up an always-on video 'portal' between its Melbourne, Australia and Xi'an, China offices – spanning 7000 kilometres. "You really do feel you are looking through a window," Nigel Dalton, chief inventor for REA, told Bloomberg. "Email is not an efficient mode of communication and nor is it very humanistic."

Other workplace innovations include virtual and augmented reality that lets people write on whiteboards from a separate location, telepresence robots that can navigate the physical office, and even burgeoning real-time translation tools to allow greater efficiencies in working across cultures and countries.

Last but not least, co-working spaces have made the leap from an independent cluster, to living within a larger business. Large enterprises are creating co-working areas in their offices for other businesses to inhabit, sometimes attached to an incubator program to fuel partnerships and collaboration. Co-working can be a catalyst for inspiring and supporting the kind of spontaneous interaction that generates and propels innovation – and it's appealing to that surging creative Millennial workforce.



The Internet of Things is creating exciting opportunities to build smart machines creatively into our work environments. A standardisation of work and leisure devices is inevitable, helping create a seamless experience and ease of use.

Takeaway Tips

- 1. Customise to suit** – One size doesn't fit all in the modern office. Invest in technology to help you and your people monitor, personalise and optimise how you use your spaces.
- 2. Future proof** – Create a reflexive workspace that will reasonably withstand changes to your business objectives, tools of the trade, and staff composition.
- 3. Inspire innovation** – Create physical areas and regular initiatives that encourage staff to get inventive. This helps make innovation a norm rather than something unusual.
- 4. Think outside the box** – Don't feel confined to equipment on a desk, traditionally configured. Your technology can move with you and be embedded in almost anything.

Konica Minolta is invested in your working future, and can help you meet emerging challenges by streamlining work flow and creating mobility for employees.

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